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In some districts doors or knockers are draped with black crape. 764

(*d*) The lowering of window blinds for some months. Some people, who follow old customs, replace all window curtains by linen sheets.

(*e*) The hiring of poor women and beggars to pray over and watch the corpse for the whole night. This custom prevails mostly in Gozo. In old days official female mourners, named *neûûieha* (from *neûûah*, "to cry") were employed. The practice was abolished in Malta during the plague of A.D. 1676.[1] Sicilians employed mourners called Praeficae or Reputatrices, a custom of Greek and Roman origin and practised by the Irish until A.D. 1849. It still prevails among the Corsicans and the Sahara tribes of Algeria. The old ceremonial of the Maltese female mourners is described by Abela as follows :— 764 767 [195] [731] [171]

They wore trailing veils (*kurkâr*), and when they entered the premises of the deceased they cut down the bower vines in the yard and threw the flower pots from the balconies and windows into the street. They searched the house for the finest piece of china, dashed it on the floor, and mixed the fragments with ashes from the hearth. They boiled the whole together in a pot, and with the mixture washed the door posts and window shutters of the house. During these proceedings they sang couplets which ended in long-drawn sighs and lamentations. Then they gathered round the corpse and knelt down, extolling the virtues of the deceased, the relations joining in their mourning.

(*f*) An oil lamp is often lit and left for forty days before the Crucifix or image of the Madonna in the death chamber. This is supposed to please the soul of the departed, whose ghost is in this way prevented from haunting the house. In some of the Gozo villages the persons attending the corpse to the burial-ground return in procession after the funeral mass to the room of the deceased, where they kneel down and say the rosary before the Crucifix, placed on a chest covered with white cloth, and between two lighted candles which are afterwards replaced by the devotional oil lamps. The belief still lingers that the 764 [354] [965] [195] [788]

[1] Abela and Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata*, vol. ii. p. 794. [113]

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The belief still lingers that the
764 lamp must remain lighted for forty days, during which the soul
• 795 of the departed remains above the flame.

764 (*g*) Some families give the poor bread. The love-feasts of
735 the primitive Christians were in mediaeval times replaced in
171 both Malta and Sicily by the distribution of cakes and of boiled wheat mixed with sesame. Distributions of meat and bread to the poor came also to be a custom at some *festas*, but were continued in Sicily mainly by the giving of beans and bread on All Souls' Day.[1] In Malta on that day, however, the old custom has been replaced by the free kitchens or the "Potage for the Poor" (*Borma tal-Fqâr*).

765 Mourning customs in Malta have during the last century
178 passed through wide changes and, as in other European coun-
[177] tries, have reverted to a more simple type. Some are purely
[192] mediaeval, and are influenced by the prolonged intercourse with Sicily and Italy during the rule of the Grand Masters. The vernacular term for mourning is *vistu*, corresponding to the Sicilian *visitusu* ("to be in mourning").

765 The wearing of special mourning clothes was general in the
292 fourteenth century, but became less marked by the year 1700.
178 Women used to wear woollen trailing skirts and dark shawls
184 over their heads. Some better-class people wore one black transparent veil over the head and another veil of black silk taffeta over the gown, reaching to the waist. A sort of Majorca woollen cloth is prescribed for mourning wear to the heirs under a will of A.D. 1543. The Grand Master's suite wore a special garment called *Scoto*, of thin light serge. Although it is nowadays customary with some families to put on as little mourning as possible and to shorten its period, a full mourning dress is worn by others for two full years after the death of parents. The simplest style of mourning, a black necktie and a crape arm band, is in general use after the death of a distant relative.

765 Family mourning is generally observed as follows :—
178 I. Closure of business premises, a mourning notice being affixed to the door.
[562] II. Women keep indoors for a few weeks, only going out in

[1] G. Pitrè, *Spettacoli e Feste Popolari*, vol. xii. p. 407.